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Navajo Department of Health (NDOH)  
Public Health Advisory Notice (PHAN)-001-23  
Caution the public regarding increase in Syphilis cases

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The Navajo Department of Health (NDOH), in partnership with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NAIHS) and Tribal Health Organizations/638s, are issuing this Public Health Advisory Notice-001-23 Caution the public regarding the increase in the number of syphilis cases and congenital syphilis cases on the Navajo Nation.

The number of syphilis cases increased over the past 10 years from 12 cases in FY2010 up to 210 cases in FY2020, with the number of new cases increasing by 156% from FY2018 to FY2020. In FY2021, there were 228 cases. Between FY2019 and FY2021 cases increased 300% and preliminary data shows cases continued to increase rapidly in FY2022. We are hereby notifying the general public of this alarming increase in cases and to take the appropriate precautions to protect themselves against contracting syphilis.

**Definition:**

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that develops in stages (primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary). The signs and symptoms for each stage are as follows:

- Primary stage – a sore or multiple sores in, on, or around the penis, vagina, anus, rectum, and lips or in the mouth. Sores may be painless and resolve without treatment.
- Secondary – skin rash and/or sores in your mouth, vagina, or anus. The rash can be on the palms of hands and /or the bottoms of feet and look rough, red or reddish brown. The rash won't itch. Fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches and fatigue.
- Latent stage – no visible signs or symptoms. Without treatment, you can continue to have syphilis in your body for years.
- Tertiary stage – untreated syphilis can affect many different organs, such as heart and blood vessels, brain and nerves. Very serious and would occur 10-30 years after your infection began if not treated.
- Congenital syphilis may be passed from pregnant mother to infant and may cause stillbirth or infant death if untreated. May cause lifelong developmental delay, and can impact hearing, eyes, teeth, and bones.

**Precautions for the General Public:**

- Syphilis can spread through skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal, or oral sex, and from a pregnant person to a fetus.
- Syphilis can spread from a pregnant mother to her unborn baby. When syphilis goes untreated among pregnant people, it can result in serious illness for the child, and can be fatal (death).
- In adults, syphilis in its late stages can cause damage to the brain, heart, eyes, nerves, blood vessels, liver, bones, and joints, and can be fatal.

Recommendations for General Public:

- Treatment – syphilis can be treated with penicillin (antibiotic). However, access to timely treatment is important to avoid serious health effects that are associated with the infection.
- Prevention – use condoms correctly every time you have sex; have a monogamous (one partner) relationship; stay away from drugs and alcohol which can increase risky behaviors.
- It is now recommended that everyone from age 13 to 64 have annual STI testing that includes syphilis. Visit your local health care facility for testing, and ask your doctor if you have any questions.
- In response to the rapid increases in cases of syphilis, NAIHS and 638 hospitals are increasing access to STI testing, treatment and now have EXPRESS STI testing at the labs that do not require an appointment or a doctor visit.

For more information regarding syphilis prevention, call the NDOH-Navajo Epidemiology Center at (928)871-6539 or visit <https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis.htm>.

You may also contact your nearest Navajo Area Indian Health Service Unit <https://www.ihs.gov/Navajo/> or 638 facility for more assistance.